

Glaucoma is a chronic eye disease that strikes without warning and often without symptoms. It is a leading cause of irreversible blindness, affecting about 3 million Americans.

Glaucoma also affects African-Americans disproportionately. According to the National Eye Institute (NEI), an African-American aged 45-64 is 15 times more likely to go blind from glaucoma than a Caucasian from the same age group.

The frequently silent progression of glaucoma is one of many reasons to encourage patients to receive a glaucoma screening. NEI estimates that up to one-half of the 3 million Americans with glaucoma may not know they have the disease.

In recognition of Glaucoma Awareness month, we've provided some questions and answers about Medicare's glaucoma screening benefit.

Does Medicare Cover Glaucoma Screening?

Medicare does have a glaucoma screening benefit. The amended Medicare, Medicaid, and SCHIP Benefits Improvements and Protection Act of 2000 (BIPA) states that Medicare will provide payment for yearly glaucoma screenings for eligible beneficiaries at high risk of developing glaucoma. This coverage began on January 1, 2002.

Who Is Considered At High Risk For Glaucoma?

1. *Patients at high risk for glaucoma include:*
2. *African-Americans age 50 and over;*
3. *Diabetics; and*
4. *People with a family history of glaucoma.*

What Types Of Glaucoma Screening Does Medicare Cover?

Medicare will cover the following types of glaucoma screening once every 12 months:

1. *A dilated eye exam with an intraocular pressure measurement;*
- AND
2. *A direct ophthalmoscopic OR slit-lamp biomicroscopic examination.*

These screenings must be performed or supervised by an optometrist or ophthalmologist legally certified to perform the exams in the patient's state.

How Is The Glaucoma Screening Benefit Paid?

Medicare covers 80% of the Medicare-approved amount for the exam. The eligible beneficiary pays the remaining 20% of the amount as a co-insurance payment, once they satisfy the \$100 deductible for Part B services.

Where Can Patients And Providers Get More Information About Glaucoma?

Patients and providers can refer to the following resources for more information about glaucoma:

- *The National Eye Institute's Glaucoma Awareness Month Web Page <http://www.nei.nih.gov/gam/>
The NEI's Glaucoma Awareness Month Web page provides detailed information about glaucoma, including the Don't Lose Sight of Glaucoma brochure.*
- *The Medline Plus Health Information Web Site <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/>
The Medline Plus Health Information Web Site provides a search function that allows visitors to view many types of information about glaucoma, including information on drug treatments and recent news about the disease.*

Where Can Patients Get More Information About Medicare's Glaucoma Screening Benefit?

Providers can refer their Medicare-eligible patients to the following resources for more information about the glaucoma screening benefit:

- *The Official U.S. Government Site for People With Medicare <http://www.medicare.gov>
The official Medicare Web site has a vast amount of information for beneficiaries, such as provider and facility searches, as well as news and updates about Medicare.*
- *The Medicare Call Center: **1-800-MEDICARE, or 1-800-633-4227 (TDD/TTY 1-877-486-2048)**
The Medicare Call Center is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Beneficiaries can order publications (some available in large-print, Braille, Spanish, or on audio tape), listen to recorded information, or speak to a customer service representative.*

Where Can Providers Get More Information About Medicare's Glaucoma Screening Benefit?

Providers can refer to the following resources for more information on the glaucoma screening benefit:

- *The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) Web Site <http://www.cms.gov>
The CMS Web site provides many helpful resources for providers, including a searchable Medicare Coverage Database.*
- *Carriers and Fiscal Intermediaries
Carriers and Fiscal Intermediaries can provide up-to-date information about Medicare policies.*